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ABSTRACT

With changes in sex role expectations in marriage, family researchers have begun to examine the concept of machismo. Two characteristics dominant in the study of machismo are aggressiveness and hypersexuality. A biological model of machismo asserts that males everywhere tend to be more aggressive than females, a sex difference which appears to have a genetic base. A modern theory of sociobiology offers another explanation for macho behavior. According to this theory, much of animal, and perhaps human, behavior is influenced by the drive for one's genes to reproduce themselves. A generally accepted psychological theory views machismo as an expression of an inferiority complex. Most research on machismo is restricted to the lower classes. Research from Mexico, Puerto Rico, England, and the United States suggests that lower class males suffer from job insecurity and compensate for their feelings of inferiority by exaggerating their masculinity and by subordinating women. Other studies point to distant father-son relationships as one factor leading to feelings of inferiority and to the development of machismo. Women may support machismo by being submissive, dependent, and passive. The combination of feeling inferior and acting superior is machismo, a trait that is repeated generation after generation. If men can be socialized toward male parental investment, the incidence of machismo may decline and the incidences of men feeling self-esteem and women feeling equal to men may rise. (NRB)

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A Theory For the Development of Machismo

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The concept of machismo is one that has been of interest to anthropologists and sociologists for some time. With the current changes in sex role expectations in marriage, it is being examined by family scholars as well. This article is an attempt to combine the traditional theorizing on the causes of machismo with the more recent contributions of evolutionary biology.

Definition

Two principal characteristics appear in the study of machismo. The first is aggressiveness. Each macho must show that he is masculine, strong, and physically powerful. Differences, verbal or physical abuse, or challenges must be met with fists or other weapons. The true macho shouldn't be afraid of anything, and he should be capable of drinking great quantities of liquor without necessarily getting drunk (Giraldo, 1972).

The other major characteristic of machismo is hypersexuality. The impotent and homosexual are scoffed at -- the culturally preferred goal is the conquest of women, and the more the better. To take advantage of a young woman sexually is cause for pride and prestige, not blame. In fact, some men will commit adultery just to prove to themselves that they can do it. Excepting the wife and a mistress, long-term affectional relationships should not exist. Sexual conquest is to satisfy the male vanity. Indeed, one's potency must be known by others, which leads to bragging and story-telling. A married man should have a mistress in addition to casual encounters. His relationship with his wife is that of an aloof lord-protector. The woman loves but the man conquers -- this lack of emotion is part of the superiority of the male (Giraldo, 1972).

Most women also believe in male superiority (Stycos, 1955), and they want their men to be strong and to protect them. According to the dominant cultural stereotype, a man must protect his female relatives from other men because they should be virgins when they marry. Knowing that other men are like himself, the macho is very jealous and, as a result, allows his wife very few liberties.

The theme of sexual promiscuity and the forces behind it are elucidated in The People of Aritama by Gerardo and Alicia Reichel-Dolmatoff (1961:146). This anthropological work investigates life in a Colombian village and has the following to say about machismo:

> This system of concubinage and short-term monogamous or polygamous unions, already established in the past century, continues today in the same form and is practiced ....by almost all inhabitants of the village. Even among the upper-class placeros who are married as Catholics, there is not a single man who has not at least one illegitimate child from such an extramarital union. Of course, there are some men with rather monogamous inclinations but they are openly ridiculed by all. Sometimes their economic situation obliges them to be monogamous, but the local prestige system does not permit it and other men would call them cowards and weaklings, and put into doubt their virility. Quite often a man then establishes such extramarital relations only so as not to lose face with his friends and to demonstrate his maleness.

In summary, machismo may be defined as: "...the cult of virility, the chief characteristics of which are exaggerated aggressiveness and intransigence in male-to-male interpersonal relationships and arroagance and sexual aggression in male-to-female reactions" (Stevens, 1973:315).

The Biological Model

It is well established that males everywhere tend to be more aggressive than are females. This is one of the few clear differences between the sexes and it appears to have genetic base (Maccoby and Jacklin,

1974). The male sex hormones, particularly testosterone, appear to be the source of male aggressive behavior, which is one of the two basic characteristics of machismo.

The modern theory of sociobiology offers a parsimonious explanation for macho behavior (Wilson, 1975). According to sociobiology, much of animal, and perhaps human, behavior is influenced by the drive for our genes to reproduce themselves. In this refinement of Darwin's basic theory, it is not the survival of the species that motivates behavior, but the survival of each individual's own genes. In this unconscious drive for "reproductive success" males may adopt one of two strategies. The first, which is called the tournament strategy, is common to most mammals. In it, males fight with each other to control, and therefore, be able to try to inseminate as many different females as possible (Devore, 1979). This neatly explains both macho aggressiveness -- fighting with other males -- and non-exclusive sex activity -- trying to impregnate as many different females as possible so as to enhance one's reproductive success and therefore ensure the survival of his genes.

The other approach, which is common to the bird kingdom, is called "pair-bonding" or male-parental investment. Among species or conditions where the survival of offspring is greatly enhanced if the father stays around to help, we find that males will mate, and stay with, just one female as this results in greater long-run reproductive success (Devore, 1979). One presumes that females of all species would be pair-bonders by nature, since they gain no reproductive benefit by having many mates, but do gain if one remains to help protect and provide for her and her offspring.

Devore cites evidence indicating that in many societies human males, like other primates, have tended to be tournament strategists, fighting with other men (homicide, war) so as to be able to control and therefore reproduce with the women. Note, also, that research consistently finds higher rates of

non-marital sex for men than for women. This higher interest in sexual variety has often been institutionalized as well: over 80% of the world's societies prefer polygyny over monogamy whereas fewer than 1% are polyandrous (Lee, 1982).

The machos of the world, therefore, are the tournament strategists and other males are monogamous pair-bonders. A biological model would look like this: (see figure 1)

Psychological Causes Of Machismo

That machismo is an expression of an inferiority complex runs through most of the explanations to be found in the literature. It is, in fact, the most generally accepted theory.

Most studies on machismo are restricted to the lower classes, where it's easier to collect data (Kinzer, 1973). The upper classes are considered less likely to exhibit machismo (Stycos, 1965). As research in the United States shows, the lower the social class, the more authoritarian the family. Comparing research from Mexico, Puerto Rico, England and the United States, Rainwater (1964) found that lower class males from all areas suffer from job insecurity and compensate for their feelings of inferiority by exaggerating their masculinity and subordinating women.

It appears that machismo may be due to feelings of inferiority, which men try to hide by acting superior. This is accomplished by avoiding feminine traits and emphasizing strong masculine ones. Ramos (1951) and Stycos (1965) both concur that an inferiority complex is the base of machismo.

Adler (1949) found the origins of feelings of inferiority in the experiences of early childhood. Examining child-rearing practices should prove illuminating in that case. Many of Lewis's writings (e.g. 1959, 1960, 1967) and those of Stycos (1965) reveal that Latin fathers show a lack of affection

toward their sons. The emphasis in the relationship is on respect -- characterised by separation, distance and fear of the father as the domestic legislator whose punishments are really something to be afraid of.

Lewis cites an example where one son said of his father: the boys had to pay room and board at home, which was humiliating; he wanted them to be exactly as he was; they could have no opinions of their own, nor could they come to him for counsel. The boys were to grow up to be tough and self-sufficient, while the girls received affection. Lewis (1960:59) reported: "most children are subdued and inhibited in the presence of their father and remain so well into adulthood."

Giraldo (1972) has developed a circular model to explain the continuation of machismo across generations. Father-son relations and child rearing practices and education create inferiority feelings in the boy. These are compensated for by the psychological mechanism of acting superior by way of the cultural institution of machismo. This compensation produces cultural traits which are conducive to the father-son relationship and child rearing practices referred to earlier, thus creating the inferiority complex in a new generation, and so on. Machismo, then, is a cultural trait to satisfy the psychological need resulting from the inferiority complex in men. The culture provides the ways to its satisfaction, looking for feelings of superiority and transmitting them down the generations.

Female Support of Machismo

A major support for machismo, which deserves separate consideration, is that of the woman's role in Latin American society. Her role is such that men can carry out their own macho roles. Women are submissive, dependent, and even endure physical punishment from men; thus, they can

be dominated. They are sexually passive, to be conquered. The cult of virginity -- staying virgin and being indifferent toward sex until marriage--gives the men female relatives to protect and makes them feel even more macho when they do succeed in seduction. Indeed, can there be a macho without a virgin to seduce, an inferior to protect, a submissive to dominate, other men to protect one's sisters from? Can males feel macho without child rearing practices for boys that create and enlarge sexual differences, making the males to feel superior (Giraldo, 1972)?

Stevens (1973) discusses the other side of machismo, which she calls Marianismo. This term refers to the concept that women are semi-divine, spiritually and morally superior to men. Her construct refers mainly to the mestizo middle-class and is principally a division of labor along sex lines due to the existence of certain ideal characteristics for the members of each sex.

Male dominance is, according to this, a myth, in part perpetuated by the women themselves because it preserves their way of life, which has certain advantages for them. Women learn that they must cater to their father's whims and that they are less important than their brothers. However, they also learn that their mother is venerated and respected by all male family members.

For this sainthood, women must have many children, which also satisfies the macho need for offspring. Grown children provide homage for the mother, who socialized her children to believe the pervasive myth of male dominance and female submissiveness. Yet the behavior of the women belies acceptance of this standard for dependent-like behaviors. Women can -- if they are subtle -- engage in men's activities, which gives them a greater variety of roles than the men have.

Drawing on the information found in the literature, a flow-chart emerges that represents the development and continued existence of the machismo construct: (see Figure 2)

In summary, poor family relations, plus low income lead to feelings of inferiority (though there is evidence that machismo exists among the middle and upper classes as well). In addition, males are taught that they are superior, which attitude they act out with aggressive and sexually exploitive behaviors. This combination of feeling inferior and acting superior is machismo, which leads to a repetition of the same factors that caused it in the next generation.

Conclusion

Can these two viewpoints be reconciled? It is generally understood today that few behaviors or traits can be explained from a totally genetic or environmental viewpoint. Most things are a combination, where biology predisposes or sets limits and environment or culture realizes or shapes that potential.

Assuming innate tendencies toward aggressive behavior and sexual variety in males, culture could serve as a "screen" pushing men towards or away from macho behavior. (See Figure 3)

With this model, a male's natural inclinations can be exaggerated towards machismo if his life situation leads to low self-esteem and if he lives in a culture where women reward traditional masculine behavior. If, on the other hand, those inclinations are deflected by a positive sense of self -- so that there is no need to prove oneself in the arena or the bedroom -- and by female refusal to reward macho behavior (for example: no sex before marriage, and a female equality movement) then the man is more likely to embrace pair-bonding.

For humans, of course, biology is not total destiny. A man's natural inclination may be to follow other primates with the macho tournament strategy, but he can be socialized toward male parental investment. If this is true, then the incidence of machismo will be less where men are prosperous (self-esteem) and women are liberated (equality).

Figure 1: The Biological Model for Machismo

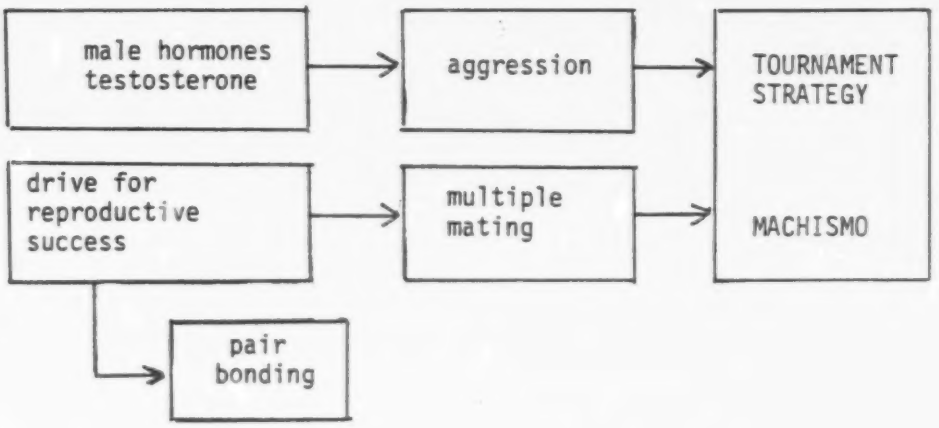


Figure 2: The Psychological Model for Machismo

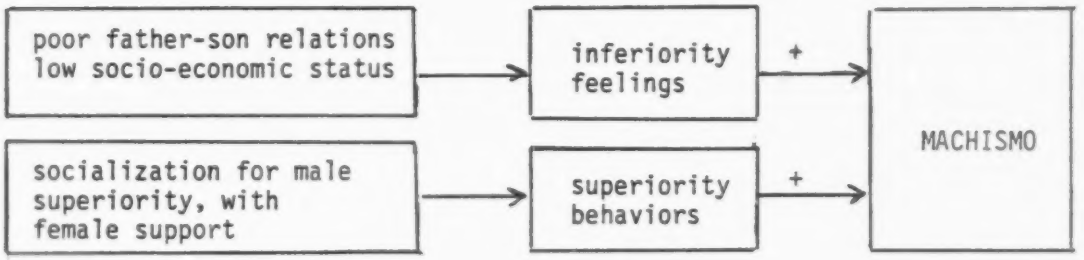
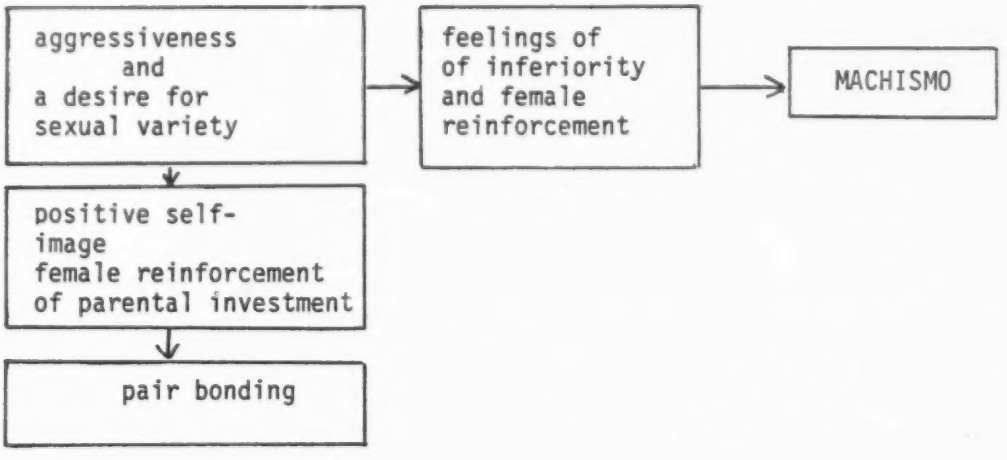


Figure 3: The Development of Machismo



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